

The Accidental Compliance Professional Lesson 1. How to Handle "The Big One"

It's clear that the person I'm sitting across from at the conference table is upset with me. He's not just upset; he's *furios*. A few other people are in the room too: my employee and his boss. However, from the moment we started this discussion, it was clear that the very angry and intimidating man was on his own. I just needed to hang in there.

This was early in my compliance career, and on that day I clearly explained the problem my compliance department found to the person who created the problem. He grew more and more upset as he listened, realizing the problem was rather large and he was sitting at ground zero. On top of that, I didn't appear to be going away anytime soon.

"We have to fix this problem, and it will have a material financial impact on you and a few of your colleagues," I told him.

The "fix" would involve refunding a large amount of money to insurance companies due to billing errors. Of course, the man I was speaking with was mad. He didn't like being told what to do. He also didn't want to refund any money. What really made him mad, though, was the fact that his future income was going to drop, because he could no longer bill for as much as he had been billing. This was a very large sum of money.

And *that*, my friends, was when the real party started. He began a rant that would go on and on for some time. Was it pure intimidation? Bullying? Verbal harassment? I'm not sure how to describe it, but I knew that it was just a scare tactic meant to distract from the real problem. Rants like that one are common in the compliance industry, but they're not all the same. Some people intimidate and bully others without any visible antics. Freakishly manipulative people who are smart, have little integrity, and remain visibly calm can be far more dangerous in the long run than the guy I dealt with that day. But guys like the one who was in front of me are far more painful—common bullies accustomed to getting their way due to having a little power. He could bully people, because no one stood up to him. Well . . . at least, not until that day.

The rant went on and on, while I sat and listened . . . *and* listened . . . *and* listened some more. I listened and I paid attention, waiting to hear anything relevant to the investigation we were conducting. One of the insults I heard was: "You're incompetent!" Was it offensive? Yes. Was it relevant to our investigation? No. Sure, I could have responded and probably *should* have responded in the eyes of many. But I was not focused on defending myself, I was going for the win. All I cared about was defending the facts.

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